Chapter V

ROLE OF THE PRESS AND RISE OF NATIONALISM IN ASSAM

The last half of the 19th century was a transitional period in Assam, which transformed the medieval Assamese society to a modern. Alike in other parts of India, introduction of social reforms, removal of social abuses and formation of modern provincial literature and development of the language are the major factors that helped in bringing about changes in the outlook of the Assamese people.

The rapid growth of Western education and ideas paved the way for the formation of association and organisations contributing to the political consciousness of the people in the region. However, appeal and not agitation was the path chosen by the people to draw the attention of the alien government for redress of popular grievances. At the outset, it took forms of individual effort and the persons of repute enjoying the confidence of the society undertook to represent popular causes to the authority. Simultaneously, a number of organisations sprang up in the State for exchange of ideas. These were mostly cultural and literary in form and they carefully avoided political discussions. *Gyan Pradhan Sabha* (1857), *Goalpara Hitasadhini Sabha*, *Assam Dosh Hitasadhini Sabha* (1855), *Upper Assam Association* (1880), *Borpheta Hitasadhini Sabha*, *Tespur Rajot Sabha* were some of the earliest organisations that existed in the last half of the 19th
century in different parts of Assam. The Assamya Sabitya Sabha (1872) and Assamya Bhasar Unmati Sambhi Sabha (1888), two important, effecting literary organisations grew outside the State. However, the foundation of Sarbajanik Sabha at Jorhat in 1884 formed the nucleus of modern political thinking in Assam. Jagannath Borooah, an Assamese tea-planter was the founder of this association. It is not known exactly what ideals inspired the members to form this sabha but an organisation known as Sarbajanik Sabha was first established at Poona by Ranade in 1870. From its very inception, Jorhat Sarbajanik Sabha criticized the policy and some of the actions of the government and acquainted the people with what they considered to be the real objects and policies of the government. But the death of its founder in 1907 brought divisions among the members and practically made it inactive.

Already the need of a broad based provincial political organisation was felt among the elite section with their background of western education. This section wanted to uphold the cause of the Assamese people. Accordingly the ground was prepared in 1903 at Guwahati for the formation of Assam Association as a new active political organisation in the State. The first session of the association was held at Dibrugarh and it formally elected Raja Prabhat Chandra Baruah president, Jagannath Borooah vice-president and Manik Chandra Baruah as General secretary respectively. Till the emergence of Assam Provincial Congress in 1921, the Assam Association played a significant role in the political field of the region.
Meanwhile, the contemporary press in Assam had highlighted the political and nationalist ideas and views of the organisations. In this respect, the nationalist outlook formed the basis of some of the newspapers of the period.

Assam Wihar (1872-1875) appeared as the first weekly newspaper in Assam from Gauhati of Kamrup district. After the lapse of about ten years of the publication of this paper, Assam News, an Anglo-Assamese weekly newspaper was published from Gauhati in 1882, which actually opened the era of modern Assamese journalism in the State. Manik Chandra Baruah, the leading statesman, social worker as well as businessman of Assam had formed a company "Buru-Phuken Brothers", with the collaboration of Amarendra Phukon, son of Amarendra Dhekial Phukon, the father figure of renaissance in Assam. Burua-Phukon Brothers dealt with the tea business and timber and was a pioneer in the field of modern business enterprises in the State. In 1882 Assam News appeared under the patronage of Burua-Phukon Brothers from Assam News Press of Gauhati. The weekly was a bi-lingual published both in Assamese and English. Hemchandra Barua, doyen of modern Assamese language had edited the paper after his retirement from government service and RaiBahadur Abhayasanhar Guha acted as the assistant editor. Manik Chandra Baruah, the key figure in the publication of the paper regularly wrote in the English section. In fact, the paper coined some words for writers in Assamese and those have been current ever since. Batori Kakot (earlier "Sambad-Patra"), the Assamese supplement of the word newspaper was the
gift of Assam News. Both the young and the old of the contemporary period held high opinion about the paper. Lashminath Basboruah had expressed his indebtedness to Assam News for showing him the correct way of writing Assamese in proper form. He lamented over for the brief existence of the paper mainly due to the illness of Hemchandra Barua. With a broad nationalist outlook the editor openly criticized the administrative policy of the British government and its language policy in Assam. The paper often criticized the attitude of the British bureaucrats to the subordinate Indian staff and always encouraged the indigenous people to uphold their self-respect in the situation of alien rule. In respect of Assam News, the Commissioner of the Assam valley districts said - "this newspaper, no doubt represents the views of, at any rate, its conductors, contributors and subscribers, who are not numerous. Its tone contrasts I think, favourably with the native press of lower Bengal. With the exception of some rather strong language on some recent criminal cases in the Sibsagar district, in which Europeans were concerned, I find nothing in this newspaper calculated to foster ill feeling between the natives and the Europeans." The circulation of this paper was about 450 copies a week, however at one time it had as many as 900 subscribers. Inspite of its high standard of language and writings, Assam News lasted for only three years and disappeared from July 1885.

Within nine years of the closure of Assam News, in 1894 Assam, the third weekly newspaper appeared from Guwahati.
It was a vernacular newspaper with occasional articles in English and printed at Asam News Press. Kalirun Barua (1847-1903), a retired school sub-inspector of Gauhati was the editor and Manik Chandra Barooah also associated himself with the editing, particularly in the English section of the paper. Asam had played an important role in the movement for the establishment of the first institution of higher education in the State. Manik Chandra Barooah had composed most of the articles and comments in English in favour of the foundation of the first college; later the Cotton College in Assam. However, Asam also published opinions of individuals and groups who opposed the opening of a college in the region. An interesting letter was published in the paper with a number of reasons as to why a college should not be established in Assam. Almost all the leading citizens of Assam were involved in the controversy over the establishment of a college in the State. Asam generally followed the path of Asam News. However, besides news and views it published a number of articles on the Hindu way of life. Although nationalist in outlook, it primarily reflected the views of the orthodox section of the higher castes. The paper was not free from financial handicaps. In the editorial of the issue of 7-14 November 1907 the editor regretted the delayed publication of the paper and revealed the fact that during the period of six and seven years the paper had to face a financial loss of about Rupees four thousand. Subjects like Durga Puja at Gauhati; High fare at Puthimari Ferry ghat; Appeal for exemption of taxes for flood and poor cultivation; Utility of
gift were selected for comments and discussions in the editorials. In the column of "Desh Rideshor Bateri" (Inland and Foreign news) news items like Hospitality of Maharaja of Darbhanga at Shillong; Benefit of ivory comb; Proposal for utilisation of un-cultivated land found place and also in the same issue the paper also attached due importance to the preservation of old temples, scripts and ancient monuments. After about seven years, it ceased its publication in 1901.

At the close of the century, a group of people belonging to both Assamese and Rajasthani (Marwari) community of Tezpur, decided in a meeting to establish a press and publish a newspaper from Tezpur. With an initial capital of Rupees two thousand, collected from the wellwishers it formed a company for the running of the proposed press and the paper. Padmanath Gohain Baruah, Joydev Sarma, Kamala Kanta Bhattacharya, Bhawanisharan Bhattacharya and Rebi Chandra Sarma Baruah the leading Assamese citizens of Tezpur were connected with the foundation of Assam Central Press at Tezpur in 1900. In the next phase, the company adopted a resolution in a meeting for publishing a newspaper from Assam Central Press and several names like Prajendra, Raybor Mukhopatra, Assam Patika were suggested for the proposed paper. Meanwhile in response to the invitation of the members of the Assam Central Press Mathura Nohan Baruah (1853-1919), a rising journalist of that period accepted the invitation to be the editor of the new paper. Thus Assam Banti was accepted the name of the newspaper and it appeared as an Anglo-Assamese weekly from the middle of
January 1900, Kamala Kanta Bhattacharya and Padmanath Gohain Baruah jointly assisted Mathura Mohan Baruah in editing the Assamese section. However, being a government employee P.N. Gohain Baruah had to manage the editorial work from the background. During the tenure of Mathura Mohan Baruah Asom Banti appeared as a nationalist paper and his independent thinking was clearly reflected in the pages of the paper. It severely criticised the administrative policy of the government and the attitude of the high officials. But within three years Baruah broke his relationship with Asom Banti and published a weekly English newspaper from Gauhati. Already Kamala Kanta Bhattacharya had left the paper because of disagreement with the management of Assam Central Press. With the exit of M.N. Baruah, Joydev Sarma was appointed as the editor of Asom Banti, but in the meantime the publication of the paper became irregular, resulting in financial losses for want of cooperation from the subscribers. Assam Central Press had to bear a loan of Rupees eighteen hundred and as a result the shareholders demanded the liquidation of the company. In fact, a group of people, who opposed the policy of Asom Banti secretly worked for closure of press and the paper. Ultimately, the shareholders agreed to handover the charge of the press and the paper to whomever agreeing to repay the loan in the name of the company. Accordingly Pandit Joydev Sarma and Padmanath Gohain Baruah took the full responsibility of the paper and Pandit Sarma and Kanaklal Gohain Baruah, the brother of P.N. Gohain Baruah became the joint owners of Asom Banti and the
Central press. It saved Asom Banti from imminent closure. However, Pandit Sarma had to face problems from different quarters in editing the paper. After some bitter experience, he had left his ownership of the press and the paper on condition that P.N. Gehain Baruah would not let the paper die during his life-time. As a result P.N. Gehain Baruah became the owner of Asam Central Press and Asom Banti, which he continued till 1944. With a new determination he had started a collection drive for the survival of the paper and thus collected Rs. 2225 from different persons and sources of Calcutta, Guwahati, Jerhat, Gauhati, Golaghat and Balijai. Asom Banti had started to appear with a new look and regain the old patronage from the government and the people. In the process of rebirth of Asom Banti, P.N. Gehain Baruah specially admitted the contribution of Jaganath Barooah of Jerhat.10

It should be noted that at the early period of Asom Banti, the paper frequently discussed country's political situation and cautioned the people against keeping away from situation which thus might harm the interest of the local people. The proposal of the partition of Bengal and creation of a new province with the union of Eastern Bengal and Assam was at the centre of political discussion at the beginning of the century. Asom Banti scented the imminent danger to Assam and in the editorial of 10 July and 17 July 1905 warned the people to take immediate steps for the preservation of the separate identity of the people and the State. Besides political items the paper also dealt with the problems
relating to social, educational and economic conditions of Assam. In this context, revival of moulidari system, increase of the salary of moolal and kusangal, introduction and extension of Assamese in educational institutions of Assam, introduction of Assamese literature as a subject of study at university level were some of the subjects which engaged the attention of the paper. It also acted as a platform for expression of opinion in connection with the establishing the first college in Assam. In a series of editorials the paper upheld the cause of the opening of a college and at a later stage Aoup Banti also stood in favour of a university in the State. In the issue of 12 February 1932 Aoup Banti demanded the establishment of a university in Assam. The paper also gave due importance to other local problems like health, weather, market-price, cultivation and visits of government officials in different districts of Assam. It looked after the interest of local youth in matter of employment in government service. Sometimes the paper was involved in court cases. During the editorship of Joydev Sarma a defamation case was filed against the paper in the Sibsagar court over the issue of an appointment of a teacher in the local government school. However, the case was dismissed in favour of the paper. The British administration of Assam gave due weight to the news and views of Aoup Banti in different fields. Sir Beauphylde Fuller, the Chief Commissioner of Assam had developed a good opinion about the paper. Once during his visit to Tezpur the representatives of Cheiduar, Sariduar, and Meduar urged him to
exempt the use of timber and cane of the forest from taxation.

As P.N. Gohain Baruah was present with the deputation, Chief Commissioner instructed them in these words — "Padmanath should deal this subject in Banti in an early issue." However, the changing pattern of political thinking in the country, gradually alienated most of the people from journals and papers following a loyalist attitude to the British government. Specially after the beginning of the non-cooperation movement such attitude of the people directly influenced the fate of old established newspapers. The paper in its fortyfour years of life changed its name from Asom Banti to Assam Banti and then Banti and from weekly it became a fortnightly. Sometimes, after casual breaks Asom Banti appeared as combination of monthly magazine and newspaper. From the beginning the paper had changed its policy in many occasions. However, in the eyes of Benudhar Sarma, a contemporary writer and historian Asom Banti is a milestone in the history of Assamese journalism. Inspite of its short comings, since 1900, for many years Asom Banti was the only newspaper for service to both the government and the people of Assam. During its heyday the paper commanded the highest number of circulation and became known to the farflung corners of the State. It carried the total image of a newspaper in the minds of the people to such an extent that even the other current newspapers including Bengali Hitabadi and Bangabashi were generally identified as Banti. Asom Banti, as an Assamese newspaper also enjoyed the longest span of life during the period of British rule in Assam.
In accordance with the proposal of Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India Bengal was partitioned, and on 16 October 1905 Assam was amalgamated with fourteen districts of Eastern Bengal. This new province was known as Eastern Bengal and Assam and this arrangement lasted till 1 April 1912. Partition of Bengal had tremendous impact on the freedom movement of the country and it gave a fresh impetus to nationalist upsurge. It led to the birth of the Swadeshi movement in Bengal, which gradually spread to the other parts of the country. As Assam was directly involved in the event of the partition of Bengal, the activities of Swadeshi movement and anarchist party caused excitement and uneasy feelings in the minds of the people of this region. However, the wave of the partition of Bengal directly touched Gauhati only and preparations were made for the formation of an anarchist party in Assam. On the other hand British government took every possible measure to keep the people of Assam away from the Swadeshi cum terrorist movement which had already begun in Bengal. The government started publicity campaign, counter the swadeshi propaganda and published a weekly newspaper from Dacca, the capital of the new province. The paper also published a separate Assamese edition for circulation among the Assamese speaking people of the State. This weekly paper was known as Biswabarta and Kaliram Berman was the editor of Assamese edition. It tried to convince the people that the terrorist movement in Bengal would not serve the interest of the people of Assam and it also analysed the merits of the new province.
Biswaabarta was Assamese edition of a Bengali newspaper. So, Col. P.R.T. Gordon, I.C.S., later the Chief Commissioner of Assam instructed the editor to use colloquial Assamese as the medium of Biswaabarta. However, in accordance with the proclamation of His Imperial Majesty, the King emperors made at Delhi on 12 December 1911 that the government had decided to bring Assam under separate administration. The new policy of the British government led to the suspension of the movement and Biswaabarta also disappeared from the scene.

V.II At the beginning of the present century the Assam Association was the only organisation enjoying the status of a provincial organisation. The government also did not fail to give due importance of the opinion of the Association in the affairs relating to the interest of the State. The last annual session of the Association was held at Tezpur in December 1920 and adopted a resolution supporting the non-cooperation programme of the Indian National Congress. In a subsequent resolution, it also decided to merge itself in the newly formed Assam Provincial Congress, representing the parent body of Indian National Congress. So far Congress party did not open any branch in Assam till the year 1920 and the State was under the jurisdiction of the Bengal Provincial Congress Committee. However, various organisations including Assam Association had started to send representatives from the State to the different sessions of the Indian National Congress since the second annual conference held at Calcutta in 1886.
The Assam Association had lost its separate identity from 1920. However, in 1931-1932 it again sprang up and made some move for the establishment of a High Court and University in Assam.

Mehandas Karwohand Gandhi (1869-1948) returned to India in 1914 after his successful non-violent movement against racial discrimination in South Africa. With the advent of Gandhiji Congress politics in India entered on a new phase and overcoming its middle class character the Indian National Congress was transformed into a mass movement for attaining the independence of India from British rule. In 1921 Mahatma Gandhi visited Assam and this led to the involvement of Assam and the Assamese people in the non-cooperation and swadeshi movement. So far, press in Assam cautiously abstained from current Congress policies of the country. However, a few papers adopted a nationalist attitude not necessarily alike to that of the Congress. Inspite of the existence of quite a few newspapers, journals and magazines only a handful of them offered support to the policy and programmes of the Congress party in its fight against the foreign government. In this respect, a lone voice had been heard in the columns of Assam Bilasini, a weekly newspaper published from Jorhat. It is to be remembered that in the beginning of the seventies of the 19th century a monthly journal Assam Bilasini (1871-1883) appeared from Dharmaprakash press of Majuli in Sibsagar district. But after discontinuation of Assam Bilasini, the Dharmaprakash press remained idle in the succeeding years. Krishna Kanta Bhattacharya (1865-1931), a government official
of the Jorhat court nursed an idea for long for publishing a newspaper to act as the watchdog of the interest of the Assamese people, under foreign rule. He persuaded Shri Kamaldev Goswami, the sattradhikar of Anami Satra to help publish a paper and to handover the press to him for reestablishment at Jorhat. However, he had to fulfil certain conditions, that the name of the press would remain as Dharmparaksh and that the proposed newspaper would be known as Assam Bilsini. Accordingly Dharmparaksh press was shifted from Majuli to Jorhat in 1912 and in September 1913 Assam Bilsini appeared for the second time from this press as a weekly newspaper.17 Krishna Kanta Bhattacharya was the soul of Bilsini from the beginning but as he was holding government post, the paper was first edited by Ghana Kanta Bhattacharya and Bidyadhar Saras. Bormah assisted him in carrying out editorial responsibilities. However, from 1916 he assumed full responsibilities of Bilsini and continued this position till the paper ceased its publication. Assam Bilsini was nationalist in its outlook. As an official of British government the editor could realise the defects and loopholes in the working of the government departments. So, Bilsini acted as a kind of a whip for all bureaucrats from top to bottom in the government. The paper could not afford to have standard printing or a large volume. However, inspite of its shortcomings the people felt special attraction to the paper and the government had to respond to its news and views. Assam Bilsini took special care to safeguard the interest of the Assamese language and culture.
The authority of the education department arranged translation of Bengali text books for Assamese students. Bilasini severely criticised this policy of the government, on the plea that it was injustice for the Assamese writers and this policy arose out of official apathy to the interest of Assam. It presented news items on the activities of the British officials with a bit of humour. Meanwhile the first world war (1914-1918) began and British administration took special care to see to it that under no circumstances the language paper should underestimate the British might in the eyes of the common people. In fact, it happened in many cases and so, the District Commissioner read almost all the columns and on occasions asked for translation of the published news into English. The Assam Bilasini gave due importance to the Home Rule Movement started by Mrs. Ame Besant and other nationalist leaders for self-government to the people of India. At a later stage Bilasini threw its weight behind the Non-cooperation movement of Mahatma Gandhi and news items on the Congress party covered almost all the pages of the paper. Thus it helped the local people to have information on the freedom movement under the leadership of the Congress party. Criticising the government policy in 1923 Bilasini pointed out that: (1) the Indian people were still subject of ill treatment in the Crown colonies; (2) the expense of the Indian army was increased; (3) there was no trail for the massacre of the Punjab; (4) that thousands were killed in Mepla state under this rule and (5) firing was made on the innocent people of Kanaighat in
Assam. In response to the appeal made by the Congress party, most of the nationalist candidates in Assam either withdrew from the election or refrained from being the candidate of the election of the Provincial Legislative Council. *Assam Bilasini* did not spare those who refused to heed this call. The paper issued a special edition on 7 November 1921 on the Non-cooperation movement. It contained the presidential speech of Lala Lajpat Rai; demand for National Council; an appeal to the people; word of gratitude to those who boycotted the council’s election; meeting at Sibsagar and Shri Shri Durga puja - seeking Her blessings for the success of non-cooperation movement. With the arrival of Mahatma Gandhi at Jorhat in 1921 *Bilasini* converted itself into an anti-government and pro-Congress paper. In the Administrative Report of the Government of Assam it was remarked that "active disloyalty and race hatred were preached by certain papers and in a number of cases it was found necessary to persecute the persons responsible for publication." Obviously, the report referred to the tone of *Bilasini* and as a result Krishna Kanta Bhattacharya, the editor and owner of the paper had to face series of persecutions from the government.

According to the provisions of the Indian Press Act (1910), the government demanded Rupees two thousand from *Bilasini* as security. The editor defended himself and demanded the withdrawal of the notice on the paper. However, his appeal failed to convince the authority and from April 1921 *Bilasini* disappeared for a short period. K.K. Bhattacharya had to
deposit the amount as security and resumed the publication of the paper from July 1923. Moreover, he was subject to mental and physical harassment for his connection with Bilesini. Meanwhile in 1916 he had to face compulsory retirement from service and being a government pensioner he was warned not to involve himself in any anti-government politics. But it could not detach him from the Bilesini. In 1921 the government finally deprived him of the pension which landed him in severe financial difficulties. In the long run, however, systematic repressive measures adopted by the government compelled him to close down the paper and Assam Bilesini disappeared finally in 1925. After five years from the closure of Assam Bilesini, he published Jana, another weekly news paper from Jorhat. The first issue of Jana appeared in 16 January 1930 from Assam press in foolscap size. Jana also started to publish news about Congress and the freedom movement of the country. With the title of Swaraj the first issue reported on the failure of the Simon Commission and declaration of independence issued by the Congress session in 1930. However, the paper was short-lived.

As the doyen of romantic literature and founder of Jonaki, Chandra Kumar Agarwala is well-known in the history of Assamese literature and journalism. In the second decade of the present century he reappeared on the scene of Assamese journalism with a more important role and promising future. With the changing social and political situation in Assam, the need for a newspaper backed by adequate financial resources
was very much felt so that the interest of the people of the province could be served. In order to fulfil this need, C. K. Agarwala had formed Assam Printers and Publishers Ltd. at Dibrugarh with the participation of persons like Sedananda Borooah, Gangaram Chowdhury, Nilmoni Phukan all leading citizens of the town to publish a newspaper as well as to encourage the co-operative movement in Assam. The company was started with an initial capital of Rupees five thousand. It should be noted that Dibrugarh had already set an example in the matter of publishing several newspapers both in Assamese and English. Accordingly on 26 August 1918 Assamiya appeared from Assamiya Press of Dibrugarh as a weekly Assamese newspaper and continued its publication for nearly forty years till April 12, 1958. From its inception Assamiya was a true nationalist paper and until his death on 2 March 1938 C. K. Agarwala was the key figure both in editing and management of the paper. Several persons including Sedananda Borooah were connected with the editorial board. However, Moheswar Baruah was the de facto editor of Assamiya from its early days. When Mahatma Gandhi came to Assam in 1921 and visited Dibrugarh he was a guest at the residence of C. K. Agarwala. This event completely changed his life-style and ideals and gradually he became a supporter of Swadeshi and the Non-cooperation movement. As a result, Assamiya, the independent nationalist paper of Assam was transformed into an active supporter and medium of nationalist ideals. In 1919 Agarwala established New Press at Kharaghuli in Guwahati and had managed to purchase
a comparatively big automatic printing machine from Calcutta. Formerly the Englishman, the famous English newspaper was printed at this machine in Calcutta. The place of publication of the Assamiya was shifted from Dibrugarh to Guwahati in 1921 and from that time the paper regularly appeared from New Press of Guwahati. The 46th Conference of Congress was held on December 1926 at Pundu near Guwahati. To mark the occasion, under the editorship of Omeo Kumar Das, Assamiya appeared as daily paper for four days. On 31st December 1930 the Lahore Conference of Congress adopted the famous independence resolution. With the editorial of Randematram, Weekly Assamiya was converted into a bi-weekly paper. In fact Tipidiniya Assamiya was regarded as an indispensable part of the Congress party in Assam. From 1934 to 1942 Assamiya was edited by Harendra Nath Baruah, a veteran journalist of Assam and during this time the paper acted as the spokesman of the Congress party. The management of Assamiya was compelled to close the paper in the last part of the year 1942. However, in 1944 Jyoti Prasad Agarwala (1905–1951) a nephew of elder Agarwala, freedom fighter and forerunner of Assamese music and film industry had published and edited Assamiya again as a weekly paper. To commemorate the event of Independence of India in 1947 the paper was converted into a daily, however, this attempt was short-lived. As weekly paper Assamiya continued its publication till 1958.

In its long forty years of publication, Assamiya was the victim of persecution under the British government on
several occasions because of its nationalist views. Weekly Asamiya in its issue of 5 February 1922 reproduced the translation of an editorial published in "Young India" edited by Mahatma Gandhi. It was on police atrocities on 18 January 1922 at Sandleria Satra of Borpetta sub-division in Kamrup district. It was stated that Assistant Police Superintendent of Borpetta Mr. W.H. Calvert deliberately destroyed the sanctity of the holy place in the time of his campaign in the area to suppress the Non-cooperation movement. Mr. Calvert filed a defamation suit against Moheswar Baruah, the editor and Tulosbi Gogoi, the printer of the paper. However, he took no action against "Young India". The owner of Asamiya and Managing Director of Assam Printer and Publisher's Company, C.K. Agarwala instructed the editor not to apologise to Mr. Calvert for the published news item. As a result on 19 June 1922 A.V. Bantick, the District Judge of Kamrup ordered the editor and the printer of Asamiya to pay a fine of Rupees one thousand and Rupees one hundred fifty, failing which he ordered their imprisonment for three months and one month respectively.24 In the defamation case against Asamiya the management had to spend a large sum of money to defend its editor and printer; however, this episode of the defamation case enhanced the prestige of the paper. In the light of the widespread propaganda of the freedom movement in the country, in 1930 the Government of India promulgated Indian Press Ordinance II to curb the freedom of the press. Meanwhile, the local administration did not have good relations with Asamiya.
The Administrative Report for the year 1929-1930 recorded that "some of the newspapers especially the Asamiya and Jnanasakti were inclined to misrepresent government policy and government officials." Asamiya in its editorial of the issue of 5 May 1930 severely criticized the Press Ordinance of 1930. On the basis of this ordinance the government directed the paper to furnish security "on the ground that they had published articles, which were likely to bring the government established by law on contempt." Accordingly government demanded Rupees two lakhs and forty thousand from newspapers of India. One hundred and thirtyone newspapers had furnished the required security money. However, nine newspapers of India including Asamiya had refused to furnish security and as a result Bi-weekly Asamiya had ceased to publish for two and half months till 19 July 1930. Asamiya always stood for social justice of all classes of people irrespective of their caste or position. The Telehu episode was an interesting story published in Asamiya which depicted the inhuman attitude of the European manager to the tea garden labourers. Telehu, a tea garden labour of Belijan T.E. of Golaghat went to his relations lived in Ukha T.E. of the same region. On his way to Ukha the manager of the garden Mr. Bate met him and kicked his stomach from horse back, Telehu died on the spot. Asamiya published the news in details and soon the other parts of the country also took note of it. Dehipik Forward of Calcutta under the editorship of Deshabendhu Chittarajan Das also wrote an editorial comment on Telehu episode. However, the court
sentenced the manager to two and half years imprisonment for committing murder. In this way the plight of the tea garden labours became known to all concerned and in this regard *Asamiya* played a significant role. Meanwhile, British trade union congress sent two members of the British parliament. They toured in the tea gardens of Upper Assam for one week accompanied by the editor of *Weekly Asamiya*. In 1988 they submitted their report and on the basis of this report the government decided to send "Whitley Commission" to study the condition of tea garden's labour. Similarly, *Asamiya* also severely criticised the spine policy of the government, which brought moral degradation of the people of the region.

*Asamiya* during its long life before and after independence upheld the cause of Assam and the Assamese and fought for social justice and freedom of the people in the eastern region of the country. From 1921 onwards *Babbi*, a monthly magazine edited by Lashmunath Borsoruh also appeared from the New Press of Gauhati. As the venue of the publication of both *Babbi* and *Asamiya* New Press for a period became almost the centre of Assamese literature and journalism. In the long forty years of the publication of the paper, *Asamiya* was transferred into three different forms weekly, bi-weekly and daily. During this period from 1918 to 1958 Chandra Kumar Agarwala, Sadananda Borooah, Moheswar Baruah, Omeo Kumar Das, Lashmunth Fuku, Amada Chandra Baruah, Dimooswar Neog, Padmanabha Chaliha, Mohan Chandra Mohanta, Hemendranath Baruah, Jyoti Prasad Agarwala, Deokanta Borooah and Jagendranath
Borkakoti edited or were actively associated with the editing of the paper of different times. In fact Asamiya served as the workshop for the production of a number of well known Assamese journalists before and after independence.

In discussing the role of the press it is known that a number of newspapers of Assam had offered their unconditional support to the freedom movement of the country under the banner of the Congress party. However, in this respect the name of Assam Sevak will be specially remembered as congress paper in Assam. Dr. Harekrishna Das, a veteran freedom fighter of the State was the founder of this paper. Under the editorship of Debendra Nath Sarma, Assam Sevak first appeared as a weekly newspaper in 1937 from Gauhati. The office of the paper was later on shifted from Gauhati to Tepur and the paper appeared from Assam Sevak Press of Tepur and Bijoy Chandra Bhagawati acted as the editor of the paper. In fact during this period he became the editor, publisher and printer of Assam Sevak and gradually it was converted to a spokesman of Assam Provincial Congress Party. The paper was devoted mostly to news and views of the activities of the Congress party. However, it also published news of international importance as well. Thus items on the Russo-German War; Tripartite Conference and Moscow; Co-operation of India and Middle east to Russian army; Warning of Mr. Churchill to Britain were published with due importance in the paper. At the time of the Quit India Movement (1942) the editor of Assam Sevak was imprisoned for a
long period and as a result the paper ceased its publication. However, after independence it reappeared for a short time.

Besides these newspapers a number of news bulletin also appeared and were circulated to draw the attention of the people on the progress and policy of the Congress party as well as freedom movement. _Swadesh_ was one of such news bulletin issued fortnightly from Sibsagar. Bimala Kanta Baruah of Sibsagar district congress was in charge of editing and circulation of the bulletin. It was circulated secretly.28 In the early days of the freedom movement in Assam, Assam Provincial Congress Committee issued a cyclostyled paper, Congress from Umanbazar, Guwahati. It carried in the main news about police atrocities in the State on congress workers. The workers of the Nationalist movement at Jorhat issued another cyclostyled news bulletin _Janambhumi_ for congress propaganda among the people. _Satradhikar_ of _Garmur Satra_ of Majuli had offered financial help for its circulation.29

V.III Despite the publication of a large number of weekly newspapers, fortnightlies and monthly magazines and journals the ventures of daily newspapers were few and far between due to various factors, mainly economic. However, in the middle of the thirties of the century an elaborate arrangement was made for publication of the first daily newspaper in Assam from Jorhat. Meanwhile, _Sadina Batori_ (Weekly news), a weekly newspaper appeared from Jorhat in 1930 under the patronage of Raibahadur Siva Prasad Borooah, a leading tea-planter of Assam. The name of _Batori_ was suggested by
Bhagawati Prasad Boroah, a young Assamese poet, who passed away in an early age. It was first printed at printing press of Doss & Company at Jorhat and Siva Prasad Boroah was the owner as well as the chief editor of the paper. However, Kirtinath Bordeoli and Ananda Chandra Barua actually managed the editing of the paper in its early stage. Later in 1931 Nilmoni Phukan, then the manager of Nilmoni T.E. was appointed as the editor of Weekly Batori. Batori was a nationalist paper and stood for the interest of Assam and her people. It was a Saturday paper and contained about twelve pages in each issue. Apart from local and provincial news Weekly Batori published telegraphic news obtained from renowned news agencies of the time. The editorial column of the paper covered topics of varied interest like Message of Governor General, Assam at Shillong, Prevention of flood, Nationalist party congress is not rebel, Development of handloom, Assami Satra, Where to go the eleven lakhs Bengali of Assam valley (22 June 1935) etc. with comments. Weekly Batori also made a wide spread publicity campaign for the establishment of a university in Assam. The paper published a special issue on first June 1935 to mark the occasion of university day and published news item with attractive headline on the university day, celebrated throughout the State on 22 May 1935. In the issue of 11 May 1935 the subject of editorial was university day in Assam. Weekly Batori claimed its circulation at over twelve thousand.

Soon the establishment of Weekly Batori was shifted to Thengal T.E. owned by Reibahadur Barua, eight miles away
from Jorhat town. He established Batori press and formed a separate establishment in the tea garden for the publication of the paper. On 12 August 1935 from this Batori press Deinik Batori, the first Assamese daily newspaper appeared. Nilamoni Phukan was the editor of Deinik Batori and the first editorial staff consisted of Benudhior Sarma, Lashminath Phukan, Karuna Kanta Gogoi and Rajiblochan Baruah. However, before the publication of Deinik Batori in the same year Tafasal Husein had started to publish a daily news sheet Nagerar Katha from Jorhat and continued its publication for few months. It cost one paisa per copy and published mostly news of the town with titbits about the personal life of the prominent public men.

Banar-Batori (News of the war), a daily news bulletin was published from Dibrugarh. Similarly, Nagerar Katha was also a news bulletin like Banar-Batori. By the time of Pandel Congress (1936) Weekly Asamiya was also transformed into daily for four days. But considering all aspects of a daily paper Deinik Batori was the first daily newspaper in Assam and Siva Prasad Baruah, the chief patron of Batori tried his utmost to make the paper well-equipped with all modern facilities. It subscribed the news of the leading news agencies like Reuter and Associated Press for the first time in Assam. Deinik Batori received the telegraphic news and on translation, published them in the daily issues of the paper. The paper also collected a large number of photographic blocks of the important persons in and outside the country. When King Edward VIII of the United Kingdom abdicated the throne,
Deinik Batori could publish the news immediately with photographs. The paper also set an example from another direction. Perhaps no daily paper of India was published from a village, but Deinik Batori appeared from Thengal, a village, where at the beginning even the facility of a post office was not available. However, later a small post office was established in Thengal basically to cater to the needs of Deinik Batori. Telegraphic news were received at Titabor four miles away from Thengal.

The paper arranged for good printing and contained eight pages in royal size; advertisement hardly covered a full page of an entire issue. It was closed on Monday and did not issue any special supplement for Sunday. Deinik Batori was attractive from many sides. However, its circulation did not exceed 2500 and as a result the income was always less than the expenditure.

Besides, editorial, letters, notice of the editor, relevant talks, local and provincial news, law courtes, vivid toka (Different notes), old annals, news from Calcutta had covered the eight pages of the first issue of Deinik Batori. "Assam for Assamese"; Deinik Batori preached this message and appealed for acceptance of this dictum as the ideals of life. In fact this ideal was reflected in the general policy of the paper and the paper always gave prominence to the interest of the Assamese people. Its editorials like Provincial government on the basis of language; High court in Assam; Will Bengali be dual language of Assam; Partition of Srilanka and the duty of the Assamese Muslims (31 August 1935) and Ideals of university
in Assam testified to the anxiety of the paper for local causes of importance to the whole of Assam. However, the paper was not pro-congress; rather sometimes it was anti-congress in tone, because both the owner and editor of the paper belonged to moderate politics of the time. Actually, Dainik Batori was conducted on the basis of the policy of the liberal party. The paper did not support the policy of Non-cooperation initiated by Mahatma Gandhi and responsive cooperation of Bala-Gangadhar Tilok. In fact, Batori was published to keep the Assamese people away from the national politics. So, it was natural that the European tea planters in Assam would accept the policy of such a paper and the owner was also equally confident of receiving patronage from this community. Accordingly, the paper got assurance of cooperation from the planter's community, but in actual field the help was not remarkable. However, almost all the tea gardens of the Brahmaputra valley subscribed copies of Dainik Batori and tea gardens of Jorhat region in Upper Assam also sent job works to be done at the Batori press. But like the Times of Assam (1895-1950) of Radhanath Changbakoty Batori could not utilise the position effectively. Inspite of all its available facilities Dainik Batori could not enjoy the goodwill of the people in general and disappeared within a short time. Yet its role in defence of the Assamese language and literature and the interest of the Assamese nationality was recognised; further, as the first Daily in the province, it acted as a trail blazer.
The attempt to preserve the separate identity of Assamese culture and traditions as a part of the bigger Indian nation was not a novel one. Already at the end of the second decade of the century such ideals were reflected through the pages of Chetona (1919-1927), a monthly magazine published from Gauhati. In the middle of the thirties another bold attempt was made in the direction of Assamese nationalism. On 22 July 1935 Deka Asom, an Assamese weekly newspaper appeared from Aruna press as the spokesman of Saramant Sebaa as well as Asom Jatiya Mahasabha. In later period an English section was also added and sometimes it also appeared as a fortnightly paper. In the closing decade of the independence movement, Deka Asom had started a kind of systematic campaign for safeguarding the identity of Assam in the background of proposals to claim Assam for a future Pakistan. The news and views of Deka Asom always contained warnings to the Assamese people about the imminent danger that might come. In this respect, news and views about the large scale influx of immigrants and resulting situation that might endanger the very basis of Assamese and their culture were elaborately published in Deka Asom. The language of the paper was sharp and straightforward and held the view that problem of Assam was different from other provinces of India and that the Assamese people should learn the lesson of self-defence. Quit India was the slogan of the Fortytwo movement launched by the Congress party in 1942. Similarly, Asom Jatiya Mahasabha also upheld the message of Quit India; Quit Asia and Quit Assam;
which was elaborately circulated through the pages of Deba Asoi. After continuation of about nine years it ceased to appear regularly. However, in spite of acute financial crisis and lack of patronage from its readers Deba Asoi continued its occasional appearance till to the death of its founder and editor Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury in 1967. In fact, Deba Asoi acted as the watchdog of the Assamese interest and built up a tradition for bold and independent outlook in defence of Assam, its people, and of course the press.

Asoi, a nationalist weekly Assamese newspaper appeared from Jorhat in July 1935. The paper was published under the patronage of Radha Kanta Handique, a leading tea planter of Jorhat and edited by Kirtinath Bordoloi, a journalist of repute of that period. However, the paper was short-lived. "Reijoi Reij" (Soevereignty lies in people) - with this message in April 1936 Asoi Reij, an Assamese bi-weekly appeared from Amada Printing Works of Jorhat. Debendra Nath Sarma, a journalist and freedom fighter edited the paper and it offered an effective platform for the expression of contemporary political opinion. In its short tenure of existence the paper gave due importance to the local news and problems. Pratiya, an Anglo-Assamese weekly appeared in 1936 as the spokesman of Milita Janaasangha from Gauhati. It was published under the patronage of Rohini Kumar Chowdhuri and Gargaram Chowdhury. Kalirau Borman and Narenath Sarma respectively edited the paper. Pratiya was critical about the activities and role of the Congress party in building the future of the nation. It
emarked large space for political news and views and also
news of local affairs concerning all walks of life. The English
section of the paper generally published news having inter-
national importance and sometimes reproduced extracts from
important national papers. The paper generally provided a
standard size of 16 pages. Rabini Kumar Chewdhury, the patron
of the paper belonged to United People's Party and later he
became a minister in the coalition ministry (1937-1938),
headed by Muhammad Saadullah in Assam. In fact, Privative was
a party paper. "Swaraj is our birth right" - with this ideal
in 1939 Swaraj, an Assamese weekly appeared from Darpan press
of Jorhat. Kirtinath Bordoloi was the first editor and
subsequently Betharam Bora also edited the paper. It contained
generally four pages but tried to cover almost all types of
subjects from party politics to book review. The paper also
gave prominence to the news on the Second World War (1939-1945)
and particularly the role of the British power in the conflict.
However, the paper never appreciated the performance of the
British army in the different battle fields. For instance, in
an editorial under the title of British prestige, the paper
discussed the position of British power in the Far East and
severely criticized the people, who very often spoke about the
might of the British army and warned them in sharp language to
change their outlook, in the context of British policy in
Europe and Far East. In the same issue, the paper also
sharply criticized the activities of Assam Public Service
Commission and had denounced the Commission as the white
Focus on local problems and needs was another important aspect of the paper. However, it continued for a short time and disappeared in the midst of the war.

At the close of the thirties *Tarun Asom*, an Assamese nationalist weekly appeared from Dibrugarh. Nandeswar Chakreverty a leading citizen and businessman of Dibrugarh was the patron and on 29 July 1939 the first issue of *Tarun Asom* was published from Sadasiva press of Dibrugarh. "Awake, Be alert and Possess the best" - this message was propagated through the pages of *Tarun Asom* and Tarun Kumar Bhatacharya was the first editor of the paper. At the beginning the paper devoted itself to political news, having international importance and started to publish news on International politics in the name of the political correspondence of the paper sent from different world capitals. However, soon the policy of the paper was changed since Benuddher Sarma was appointed as the new editor from December 1939. Saradasankar Prasad Dutta and Karuna Kanta Baruah acted as the assistant editors. *Tarun Asom* generally published news with its independent style in a language having colloquial touch. It sometimes created controversy and led to the prosecution of the editor in a number of occasions. Once the editor, Benuddher Sarma had to explain to Mr. C.S. Gunning, Deputy Commissioner of Lakhimpur district the meaning of "Hitlare Letakundaise" (Hitler is making cocoon) published as headline of a news item in the paper. However, he was able to convince Mr. Gunning that it did not lower the prestige of the British
army, rather predicted the downfall of Hitler. Similarly the word “joger” (clever) used in connection of the appointment of a teacher at Sadiya school also brought difficulties to the paper and the editor had to face a defamation case. The paper was always conscious about the future of the Assamese people in the event of large scale influx of immigrants from outside the state and its pages were full of news and views over the infiltration problem. Due to acute shortage of paper, it had to cease publication in 1942.

With the progress of the independence movement in India, apart from the Congress party various political organisations having new ideals sprang up in the province, particularly among the young section of the people. Such ideals and teachings were reflected on the contemporary papers and journals published mostly in the thirties. Panchayat was such a paper in Assam at the close of the forties of the present century. It was a weekly newspaper and served as the spokesman of Assam Krishak Banna Panchayat. The paper was published under the editorship of Kedar Nath Goswami. Panchayat declared that the National Assembly of Delhi would not serve the interest of the people and the present system of exploitation would be maintained. In respect to the grouping proposal of the British Cabinet Mission in 1946 the paper declared that nobody had right to sacrifice Assam to grouping. If necessary Assam would form her own administration and with representatives of the city, village and factory panchayat would form independent socialist panchayati system of
It is to be remembered that to avoid partition of India, at the close of the independence movement the Cabinet Mission (1946) put forward a proposal for a three-tier federal government with grouping of the states in three groups. Accordingly, group e was to consist of Bengal and Assam. The people of Assam under the Provincial Congress party led by Gopinath Bordoloi (1890-1950) had started anti-grouping agitation to preserve the autonomy of the State. However, the leaders of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee had received the blessings of Mahatma Gandhi, in their protest against the grouping proposal. Besides the news of the Panchayat, the paper also carried national and international news with thought-provoking comments. Panchayat was first published in 1946 and issued six pages in each issue. It served the interest of the Assamese people, particularly in the critical hour of grouping proposal for the future of the State. Abhanga Bharat, another Assamese weekly was published from Gauhati in the independence year of 1947. Keshakanta Baruah was the chief editor of the paper. It was influenced by the ideals of Hindu Mahasabha.

The advent of Jansabhumi, an Assamese weekly in the first week of March 1947 marked the close of an era of Assamese journalism in the pre-independence Assam. It was first published from Darpan press of Jorhat till the foundation of Jansabhumi press. Dulal Chandra Bhuyan was the first editor of the paper. Published about four months before India attained independence, its news and views regarding the
national issues naturally received priority. The paper protected what it considered to be the national interests of Assam, and firmly stood to save Assam from the possible annexation to alien States under the Group C scheme. Moreover, the paper expressed grave concern at the large scale influx of outsiders to the region, which might changed the demographic pattern of the State and harm the interest of the indigenous people. So, most of the news and views of the paper were presented from the angle of the said problems at the initial period of publication. Weekly Janaabhumi enjoyed a long lease of life and continued its publication till today.

A large number of newspapers and journals appeared from the Surma Valley, mostly in Bengali language. It successfully tried to compete with the Bengali papers published outside the State. Sometimes in rare occasion, a handful of papers also made an endeavour to publish an additional edition in Assamese for the benefit of the other people of the State. Saptahik Suran was a Bengali weekly, which simultaneously published an Assamese edition of the paper. It appeared in 1945 under the editorship of Romesh Chandra Das. It was printed and published from Islamic press of Sylhet. The paper mostly carried news on the Second World War. It seemed the paper was pre-government in character and published, with an intention to make the war effort popular among the people in support of the cause of the British government.
NOTES ON CHAPTER V


4. Report On the Administration of the Province of Assam, for the year 1883-1884, (Shillong, 1885)


6. *Assam*, 22 July, 1895

7. Gait, op.cit.

8. *Assam*, Wednesday 7 to 14 November, 1900


10. Ibid., pp. 172-179

11. Ibid., p. 111

12. *Assam Banti*, 14 July, 1913


15. Sarma, op.cit.


19. Ibid., Vol. VIII, No. 1, 7 July, 1923

20. Report on the Administration of the Province of Assam, for the year 1921-1922, (Shillong, 1923)


23. Ibid., p. 73


26. Sarma, Sashi, op.cit., p. 89

27. Asom Sevak, 5 October, 1941


32. Phukon, *op.cit.*, p. 149

33. *Deka Asom*, 16 October, 1945


